



Cucurbits

DID YOU KNOW?

The largest fruits in the plant kingdom are pumpkins. The biggest pumpkin ever grown weighed 606.7 kilograms (about 1,338 lb)!



ORIGINS

Most of the cucurbits are native to the Americas. They were among the first plants to be domesticated in the New World.

Squash is one of the three sisters (corn, beans, and squash) in the Native American cropping system.



CLASSIFYING CUCURBITS

FAMILY

Cucurbitaceae

There are about 800 species in this family.



GENUS

Cucurbita

In Latin, this means "gourd."



There are 14 species in this genus.

SPECIES

Scientists have grouped cucurbits into different species based on differences in the structure of the flowers and other plant parts. Three species commonly grown in gardens are:

Cucurbita maxima

hubbard
squash



big max
pumpkin

Cucurbita moshata

buttercup
squash



spaghetti squash

Cucurbita pepo

butternut
squash

gourd



zucchini

acorn
squash

yellow crookneck

CUCURBIT PLANTS

Summer squash, such as zucchini and yellow squash, grows like a bush. Winter squash and pumpkins have long running vines.

pumpkin vine



Cucurbit plants have large leaves.

On a single plant, male and female flowers look like large, yellow, flaring funnels.

The female flower has a swelling, which becomes the fruit.



male flower

USES

Summer squash can be eaten—rind, seeds, and flesh. Winter squashes must be cooked. They are usually baked or steamed. You can also use them in breads, pies, cakes, cookies, and casseroles.



You can store winter squash and pumpkins in a dry, cool, airy place for winter use.

GROWING AND HARVESTING CUCURBITS

Cucurbits are warm-season crops. Plant in full sun at least one week after the last frost date. Summer squash can grow close together, but the vines of pumpkins and winter squash need more space to grow. Add lots of organic matter to the soil. Cucurbits have deep roots and need lots of water, so water deeply and slowly.

I pick summer squashes when their fruits are young, small, and tender. Pumpkins and winter squash won't be ready until later in the fall when they have a hard shell.

